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REMARKS ON THE FIRST ODE OF HORACE

BY HENRY M. MARTIN

The main lines along which the first ode of Horace must be interpreted have long since been drawn and fixed, but its content is rich enough to allow yet further refinements and difference of opinion on individual points. Professor Earle, writing in 1901, expressed the fear of adding to the *ἄχθος ἀρούρης*¹ already accumulated about it, but, feeling that a correct interpretation of the poem had not yet been reached, he published one satisfactory to himself based largely on an emendation, or at best on an old reading, *te* for *me*, vs. 29. Since that time scholars undismayed have made other contributions, and study of the ode still goes on and, we may believe, forward.

1. The phrases² employed by various scholars as titles of the ode intended to concentrate in a few words the point and purpose of its composition are open to the objection of adopting as titles for the whole that which is better taken of a part only. These titles are unsatisfactory in that they miss the importance of the opening verses, 1, 2, and of the closing verses, 35, 36, or else give them a vague and noncommittal part in the thought. According to the view here censured, vss. 1, 2 are treated as a merely ornamental headpiece, a bit of adulation addressed to a patron,³ as convention required, and vss. 35, 36 are regarded as an afterthought, a return⁴ to the starting-point after the cardinal purpose has been absolved, an appendix

¹ *Classical Review*, XVI, 398.

² "An Apology for Poetry"; "A Defense of Poetry"; "professio muneris poetici et comparatio aliorum studiorum" (Curschmann, *Horatiana* [Berlin, 1887], p. 11); "sua voluptas quemque trahit, cui voluptati aliena semper opponitur" (Earle, *op. cit.*, p. 399).

³ It is, however, a little more than a pleasing compliment; in connection with the next line it has the force of "so far above us, yet whose power is my protection," etc. (Wickham, note on vs. 1).

⁴ "Und nun kehrt das Gedicht zu seinem Ausgangspunkt zurück: wenn ich vollends deinen Beifall finde, und du mich als den ersten wahrhaften römischen Lyriker, als den römischen Alcaeus meinen klassischen Mustern zur Seite stellst," etc. (Kiessling, note on vss. 29 ff.).

performing no vital function. As a matter of fact vss. 35, 36 contain the thought-citadel of the ode to which all the rest leads by the path of rhetoric and for which the way is prepared with all the proverbial Horatian tact and urbanity. Now the purpose,¹ in the sense of outstanding thought, of the poem is not to defend the poet's calling, though that conception of it does summarize a great deal of its subject-matter, nor yet to dedicate the first three books of odes to Maecenas, though in it the dedication may be accomplished, but simply to express the hope that he be regarded as the lyric poet of Rome corresponding to Alcaeus among the Greeks and to that end bespeak the sympathy of Maecenas.² To Maecenas the request is properly preferred because of the value of his literary opinions, the finality and decisiveness of his judgment in that world for which Horace wrote and whose verdict in his favor he craved.³ The epilogue at the end of the third book shows that in his own mind Horace already held that previously unoccupied field; he now covets recognition and confirmation of that personal claim.⁴ The bad taste—indelicacy or egotism—of the procedure, if there be any in it, is relieved by the fact that Horace wrote only for a few whose tastes coincided with his own, by the use of a phrase indicating great mental exaltation (*feriam sidera*, etc.) instead of a blunt and tactless request or demand and by the introduction of the preceding condition (*si neque tibi*, etc., vs. 32) suggesting modest doubt. The hint or hope is also not

¹ "Die reale empfindung (deren darstellung der eigentliche zweck des gedichtes sein müste, wenn die lyrische form nicht blosser schein ist) würde die freude sein, welche der lyriker an seiner tätigkeit findet, gemischt mit einem gefühle der besorgnis oder der resignation, welches aus der erkenntnis eigner unvollkommenheit entspringt" (Plüss, *Neue Jahrb. f. Philol.* CXXXIII, 123).

² Many others have considered this as one of the ideas presented in the ode, but no one seems prepared to defend the view that it overshadows all else and that the procedure is in Horace's manner. Cf. "Dieses Gedicht ist aber nicht bloss eine Widmung, nicht bloss ein Vorwort, es ist auch ein Programm" (Rosenberg, *Neue Jahrb. f. Philol.*, CL, 234); "Also zwei grosse Gedanken sind es, die Horaz in dem an die Spitze aller Oden gestellten Gedichte zum Ausdruck bringt. . . . (1) Mit vollem Bewusstsein bekennt er sich als *vates* und *interpres* des Idealismus und wirft dem Materialismus seiner Zeit den Fehdehandschuh hin. (2) Er weiss, dass er mit solcher Gesinnung das Missfallen der materialistischen Menge (*ignobile vulgus*) erregt, darum wendet er sich an das Urteil eines Mäcenat," etc. (Curschmann, *op. cit.*, p. 9).

³ "Non ego ventosae plebis suffragia venor | Impensis cenarum et tritae munere vestis; | Non ego, nobilium scriptorum auditor et ultor, | Grammaticis ambire tribus et pulpita dignor" (Hor. *Ep.* i. 19. 37 f.; *Sat.* i. 10. 81 f.).

⁴ *Ep.* i. 19. 32 f.

indelicate when addressed to one who has been previously stated to be *praesidium et dulce decus meum*.

It is possible to regard the ode as a cause of the *genus demonstrativum*, perhaps, in which vss. 1, 2 are the *exordium*, vss. 3-34 the *probatio*, and vss. 35, 36 the *peroratio*. This distribution of thought assigns each part its exact relation to the whole; under this view no part can be considered as fortuitous or as an excrescence. The *exordium* is written along rhetorical lines to prepare the mind of the arbiter, Maecenas, for the request to come later and win his favorable hearing and attitude.¹ Reference is made to his princely lineage because this would imply breadth of view, cultured traditions, and large importance, and to the intimate relations already existing between the two men in justification of the natural desire for further favors. Neither mention is mere blarney. The *probatio* takes the familiar form of *comparatio*² in which it is shown that the poet's vocation, though it is eschewed by some, is like other men's choices in the directing of their life or not more strange than they and deserves like recognition. Of course there is an augment here³ finding its equivalent in the feeling which is diffused through the enumeration rather than openly expressed that the poet views his calling as being on a higher plane than the other pursuits mentioned, thus making the way easier for a favorable decision and heightening the importance of Maecenas' attitude toward the question. Further, the delicate Greek aroma in which this, the first poem of the collection, is steeped gives evidence of a cosmopolitan spirit and of a nature sympathetic with those traditions which alone could enrich the Latin lyric and entitle it to a place beside the Greek. This excellence is prophetic of much for the collection, giving promise that the Roman poet may awake again those chords silent now for many centuries.

¹ "Causa principii nulla alia est, quam ut auditorem, quo sit nobis in ceteris partibus accommodatior, praeparemus" (Quin. *Inst. Or.* iv. 1. 5); "Iudicem conciliabimus nobis non tantum laudando eum, quod et fieri cum modo debet et est tamen parti utrique commune, sed si laudem eius ad utilitatem causae nostrae coniunxerimus, ut adlegemus pro honestis dignitatem illi suam, pro humilibus iustitiam, pro infelicibus misericordiam, pro laesis severitatem et similiter cetera" (*ibid.* iv. 1. 16).

² "Adposita vel comparativa dicuntur quae minora ex maioribus, maiora ex minoribus, paria ex paribus probant" (Quin. *ibid.* v. 10. 87).

³ Wickham, introduction to first ode, closing sentence.

Under the cover of this proof or vindication the suggestion for the seal of the poet's ambition is artfully put forth in conditional and indirect form.¹ The thought of the entire ode will then be: "O Maecenas, I appeal to you as my pride and vindicator! One man has tastes which do not appeal to another, yet they may have merit and men will not abandon their chosen interest to adopt another's. My choice is like the choice of other men, only higher, and my heart is in it. Give it the countenance a higher calling deserves." It does not appear that the beauty or good taste of the ode is in any way marred² by this simple and natural interpretation of what the words seem actually to mean, while the unity thus gained is undeniable.

2. Within the enumeration (vss. 3-34) two of the characters, viz., the hunter and the man of leisure, are not of the same class as the rest, since their interests cannot properly be called pursuits, thus creating a momentary impression of lack of symmetry. They are not out of place, however, for the poet wishes to refer to the choices men make not merely in their vocations but also in their avocations, to include their tastes, and their evaluation of life and time. The wide selection is both artistic in the pleasing variety induced and effective in argument, because thereby the poet's own choice is made to appear more reasonable and as adopted from a wider range of interests.

Furthermore, in the case of each activity it is made specific by an expressed word why the choice is attractive to him who made it and clings to it or unattractive to another who sees its disadvantages, or both. When the one viewpoint only is expressed the other can to some extent be inferred. For example, the athlete incurs danger (*meta evitata rotis*) for which, however, the winning of the prize of

¹ "Et quae concilient quidem accusatorem, in praeceptis exordii iam diximus" (Quin. *op. cit.* vi. 1. 12); "Vitandum etiam, ne contumeliosi, maligni, superbi, maledici in quemquam hominem ordinemve videamur. . . . Nam in iudicem ne quid dicatur non modo palam, sed quod omnino intellegi possit, stultum erat monere, nisi fieret" (*ibid.* iv. 1. 10); "Ut autem nostrum miserabilem, si vincamur, exitum, ita adversariorum superbum, si vicerint utile est credi" (*ibid.* iv. 1. 29); "Fiducia ipsa solet opinione adrogantiae laborare. Faciunt favorem et illa paene communia, non tamen omittenda, vel ideo ne occupentur: optare, abominari, rogare, sollicitum agere. . . ." (*ibid.* iv. 1. 33).

² "Der ausdrück 'vorrede' ruft die vorstellung eines praktischen, also unästhetischen zweckes hervor, ist also irreführend" (Plüss, *op. cit.*, p. 118).

victory may atone; the politician's efforts to reach highest honors may be thwarted by defeat at the polls (*mobilium turba Quiritium*); though the *mercator* lose an occasional ship (*luctantem Africum*), yet wealth flows into his coffers; the peasant finds comfort for his grueling labors in the thought that he is tilling his ancestral acres (*patrios agros*), and so on through the entire series,¹ till we reach the poet, whose profession raises him above the dull and unaesthetic throng (*secernunt populo*). The effect of these words, which though not absolutely necessary for the argument are often emphatic by position, is to introduce the principle of compensation and therefore to magnify the dissimilarity of tastes among men and stress the tenacity with which each class follows its own inclination. The indirect effect is also to relieve the poet's own *penchant* of any suggestion of strangeness attributed to it by men of unimaginative mould and narrow vision. The adverse judgment rendered against any occupation need not be and is not the poet's exclusively, but that of men not engaged in the pursuit mentioned at the moment. Hence it is possible to say that Horace himself is not out of sympathy with what other men elect to do as their life's work or with their personal inclinations and can reasonably expect from them a like degree of toleration. The resultant argument is one of universal application—as though a mariner might explain his devotion to a seafaring life and vindicate it against the isolation and exposure inseparable from it by pointing out corresponding disadvantages in other occupations and asserting a sailor's pleasure and satisfaction in the beauty and grandeur of the ocean whether in calm or storm. Each person, whatever he be engaged in doing, is thus by the very act of prosecuting his chosen vocation in the face of some discouragement put in the position of justifying it—against the imputation of dangers, uncertainties, small returns, and what not that go with it. By the same implication is Horace defending the dedication of his life

¹ No sure indication can be gathered as to precisely what import is conveyed by the words used to describe the business of the large landowner (vs. 9). He is probably mentioned, however, as typical of the class which operates on an extensive scale in an independent way risking its capital in foreign enterprises. If so, he will not be thought of by anyone as unduly intent upon gain (*proprio*), or as suffering inconvenience in engaging in enterprises beyond the bounds of Italy (*Libycis areis*).

to the service of the Muses, affirming his pride in intellectual interests and finding therein compensation for the taunts of the scornful.

This view of the content of vss. 3-34, reached perhaps by a process of reasoning similar to that outlined above, has been accepted by scholars with almost complete unanimity,¹ but there have been few or even none to go further and attempt to specify the indictment² against poetry which here awakened the good-humored but enthusiastic zeal of the poet in its defense. The failure to prosecute this natural inquiry is an oversight, for there can be no defense where there has been no charge. It seems probable, then, that Horace is not upholding the superiority of idealism over materialism³ in the broad sense of those terms nor setting forth the advantages of his calling against any disparagements of it suggested by a comparison with those pursuits previously mentioned in the ode. He is rather combating the narrow view that poetry is the mere vamping of clever idlers. For beneath the broad interests and refined tastes including appreciation of poetry happily regnant in a large circle during the principate of Augustus ran an undercurrent of contempt for the activity of poets. To the enterprising Romans makers of verse seemed visionary and unbusiness-like, even unenergetic, while their reflections were rated as capricious and their efforts as unremunerative by the practically minded, with all the disdain of things cultural instinctive in the Roman man of affairs. Horace is not alone in setting his face against such a misconception of the poet's rôle in society. Ovid more than once valiantly flung down the gauntlet to those who entertained this world-old and conventional prejudice; his challenge was supported by other writers of the period, as occasional references

¹ So Wickham, Ritter, Kiessling, L. Müller. But cf. Plüss, *op. cit.*, p. 118: "Kann denn aber rechtfertigung der dichterischen thätigkeit überhaupt der zweck eines gedichtes sein?" Curschmann, *op. cit.*, p. 11: "Erstens ist doch in der augusteischen Zeit keine Rechtfertigung der Dichterberufs mehr nötig und zweitens ist von einer Rechtfertigung auch keine Silbe in den Versen unserer Ode zu lesen."

² L. Müller (introduction to ode 1) notices the point, but makes nothing of it: "Horaz rechtfertigt sich vor Maecenas wegen seiner unbezwinglichen Neigung zur Poesie, die bis dahin bei den praktischen Römern sich nicht besonderer Achtung und Sympathie erfreut hatte."

³ "Mit vollem Bewusstsein bekennt er sich als *vates* und *interpres* des Idealismus und wirft dem Materialismus seiner Zeit den Fehdehandschuh hin" (Curschmann, *op. cit.* p. 9).

show. We are left, therefore, not without evidence¹ from many sources that poetry did have its detractors even in a most enlightened age who belittled its usefulness and evaluated the time spent in its creation as squandered. The need of vindication, then, naturally follows, unless the untenable position be assumed that the apology for poetry, being an invention of Greek poets,² became a conventional practice and virtually obligatory upon all who thereafter essayed that rôle. If this be true, Horace is following tradition not referring to conditions actually prevailing in his own day.

3. It is simpler and more satisfactory to approach the arrangement of terms in the *probatio*, vss. 3-34, in accordance with the general principles laid down by the ancients under *dispositio*³ without attempting to distribute them among specific rubrics. Rhetoricians left great freedom to the pleader in the matter of arranging arguments under the caption *probatio*, and the pleader indulged it. He might start with the more important or the less important, or begin in the middle; he might compare, contrast, or interlock. The obviously necessary restriction was that the separate reasons should harmonize with one another, revealing no sutures; should relate to a definite end and hence create the impression of unity. It was not intended that the plan of co-ordination of the various parts should be apparent.⁴ Horace has interwoven the members of his argument with the skill and easy insouciance of an experienced artist. In it there is nothing forced, nothing extraneous; we have only to follow, admiring the harmonious diversity, but at the same time feeling relieved of the

¹ "Quid mihi, Livor edax, ignavos obicis annos | Ingeniique vocas carmen inertis opus?" (Ovid *Amores* i. 15. 1-2); "nunc ederae sine honore iacent, operataque doctis | cura vigil Musis, nomen inertis habet" (Ovid *Ars Am.* iii. 411-12); "Saepe pater dixit 'Studium quid inutile temptas? | Maeonides nullas ipse reliquit opes'" (Ovid *Tristia* iv. 10. 21-22). See Friedländer's discussion, *Sittengeschichte Roms*, III, 429-30.

² Ritter (Int. to Odes i. 1). "Consimiles sententias apud Graecos poetas legi."

³ "Illa enim est potentissima quaeque vere dicitur oeconomica totius causae dispositio, quae nullo modo constitui nisi velut in re praesente potest: ubi adsumendum proemium, ubi omittendum: ubi utendum expositione continua, ubi partita: ubi ab initiis incipiendum, ubi more Homérico a mediis vel ultimis: ubi omnino non exponendum: quando a nostris, quando ab adversariorum propositionibus incipiamus, quando a firmissimis probationibus, quando a levioribus," etc. (Quin. *op. cit.* vii. 10. 11 f.).

⁴ "Neque enim partium est demum dispositio, sed in his ipsis primus aliquis sensus et secundus et tertius: qui non modo ut sint ordine conlocati, laborandum est, sed ut inter se vincti atque ita cohaerentes, ne commissura perluceat: corpus sit, non membra" (Quin. *ibid.* vii. 10. 16).

necessity for making an analysis, which if made would prove to be only artificial and non-Horatian.¹ It is not possible to unravel the woof of his intricate texture; in the attempt delicate threads may be sundered with consequent marring of the pattern.

WELLS COLLEGE

¹“It will thus be seen that the poem falls into two divisions of 18 verses each, and that these divisions are severally subdivided into a group of 10 verses and a group of 8 verses. Furthermore, the first group of 10 verses is balanced with the second group of 8 verses; contrasted nations are balanced with contrasted individuals; the first two verses (1-2) are balanced with the last two (35-36)” (Earle, *op. cit.*, p. 399; cf. also Kiessling’s analysis referred to by Plüss, *op. cit.*, p. 117).